

# PHOTOS FROM THE PAST

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## BACKGROUND OF U.S. VENTURE IN VIET-NAM

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HOW did the U.S. imperialists come to be in South Viet-Nam 12 years ago when they started their dirty war which is generally condemned all over the world? Washington must hope that the origins of the aggression have been long forgotten, but that is not so. The current U.S. aggression in South-East Asia is a logical outcome of the whole of U.S. post-war policy. But it should be noted that the events of the spring and summer of 1954 had a primary part to play in it.

In a speech in the U.S. Senate in March 1964, Senator Democrat Wayne Morse said: "It was President Eisenhower who undertook U.S. policies to try to shore up the remnants of the colonial interests in South-East Asia. Regrettably, President Kennedy and Johnson have pursued that unfortunate and misguided effort.

"Secretary McNamara is only presiding over the rotten fruits of that mistake of 1954. He is only trying to play a losing hand dealt the United States in 1954. The only question is how much he is going to bet on it, and how much the American people are going to lose before we recognise our mistake and rectify it."

Of course, it is futile to represent the Kennedy-Johnson Administration as merely continuing the Dulles-Eisenhower venture. But Morse is right when he says that the U.S. colonial gamble in South Viet-Nam cannot be fully assessed without recalling some of the events of the quite recent past.

### OPERATION "VAUTOUR"

ON March 20, 1954, French Chief of Staff General Paul Ely stopped over in Washington on his way home from Indochina. The very fact of his trip was noted by international opinion,

<sup>1</sup> Congressional Record, March 30, 1964, p. 6357.

but for a long time the content of his talks in Washington remained secret, and the veil was slightly lifted only a year later by Fletcher Knebel in *Look*.<sup>2</sup> A biography of John Foster Dulles published in the United States two years later gave a full account of the background to the Ely talks.<sup>3</sup>

These sources make it clear that, having made a detailed study of the situation in the theatre of military operations, General Ely arrived at the conclusion that without external military interference the French forces in Indochina would suffer an inevitable defeat. During his talks with U.S. political and military leaders, General Ely discussed a possible U.S. air strike against the patriotic forces in the Dien Bien Phu area.<sup>4</sup>

General Ely could hardly find a more responsive audience, for the United States had long been giving active support to the dirty war in money and materiel. But to Washington's dismay all this aid flowed through Paris, for the French Government was firmly determined to "protect" Indochina from direct U.S. interference. In his memoirs, President Eisenhower says: "But so important did the French consider their exclusive responsibility to resolve the conflict favourably that even after the United States began to provide money and material to assist them, they would accept such aid only on the basis of using it according to their fixed political and military policies."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Look*, Feb. 8, 1955, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> John Robinson Beal, *John Foster Dulles: A Biography*, New York, 1957, pp. 204-218.

<sup>4</sup> General Ely's memoirs published in 1964 confirm the American version of these events, although he tries to emphasise that he was acting in Washington in strict conformity with the French Government instructions.

<sup>5</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, New York, 1963, p. 337.

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